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Pluriactivity and family farming in Brazil:

the case of Rio Grande do Sul

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This article analyses the phenomenon of pluriactivity in family farming in the south of Brazil, based on a research project funded by the Brazilian National Council for Research and Development. The methodology used compares farms whose families live exclusively from agriculture, with those whose social reproduction depends also on non-farm activities or who practise "pluriactivity". On the question of ownership succession, we found that the phenomenon studied here does not alter traditional mechanisms of succession and inheritance on the family farm. The farms that are most under threat are those with the lowest incomes, whatever their situation in terms of pluriactivity; but the latter is not necessarily a feature of the economically weakest farms.

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I
Introduction

Brazilian social sciences have undergone major thematic renewal over the last decade. New issues have been incorporated into a research agenda that emerges, in particular, from society's demands and the pressure exerted on the State by organized social groups. The latter include organizations representing agricultural and rural interests (professional associations, unions, cooperatives and others), and those that operate in urban spaces (consumers, ecologists and so forth). By way of synthesis, and to illustrate the thread of the argument pursued in this paper, three broad thematic areas can be identified, forming the new research agenda in the field of agrarian and rural studies: (i) consolidation of the family farm as an analytical category and target of public policy; (ii) incorporation of the principle of sustainability (due to the influence exerted by Brazilian and international organizations that are highly sensitive to the environmental and social problems caused by intensive farming models); and (iii) new rurality studies, which take account of the new dynamics observed in the Brazilian countryside in terms of the occupations of people living in those zones (pluriactivity, rural non-farm employment, provision of services). These form a complex and heterogeneous social structure in which new social actors are emerging, apart from farmers, who increasingly depend on activities and incomes that have little or nothing to do with farming.

This paper focuses specifically on the third thematic area, and sets out to analyse the prevalence and characteristics of pluriactivity in the region of Rio Grande do Sul (RGS), Brazil's most southerly state, which is home to one of the country's most important family farming sectors.[1] The article firstly outlines the history of the concept of pluriactivity, and sets forth the methodological framework for the empirical research that underlies it. Secondly, data showing the ways in which pluriactivity is manifested in the Brazilian rural sector are presented and analysed, revealing increasing loss of identity between family and farm. This trend is giving rise to the emergence in Brazil of a completely different scenario than that normally envisaged in the rural world, whether from the academic point of view or from the standpoint of public policy.

II
From part-time agriculture to pluriactivity

One of the premises of this article is that both part-time agriculture and pluriactivity are phenomena associated basically with family farming and form part of the survival strategies adopted by small-scale peasant farmers to ensure their families' social reproduction. Such strategies have been developed through a combination of different activities (farming and non-farming) pursued either on or off the actual farm premises.

Although the two concepts relate to quite similar empirical realities, not only do they differ in their scope and importance, but they also reflect different historical phases of sociological research on agricultural and peasant

□ The research that formed the empirical basis of this article began in 2002 and ended in 2004. It was undertaken with financial support from the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development.

[1] There are 2,055,157 family farms in the states of northeastern Brazil, compared to 907,635 in the south. Nonetheless, whereas in the former case 52.2% of farms are classified as "almost without income", the equivalent figure in the southern states is 24.7%, while in Rio Grande do Sul just 21.1% of farms are in this situation. Although the universe of family farm properties is quantitatively much larger in northeastern Brazil than in the southern states, an overwhelming majority undertake subsistence agriculture with little or no market activity. On this point, see "O novo retrato da agricultura familiar", available at http://200.252.80.30/sade/.

development and the assessments made by sociologists and agrarian economists on the nature of this process and how it unfolds.[2] The link between part-time farming and the industrialization process has often been noted, as broad peasant sectors have entered partially into the industrial and services economy, working part-time on their smallholding and part-time as wage earners in factories or service enterprises within their neighbourhood. All languages have words to refer to what is now a classical concept of the agrarian social landscape (campesino obrero, *worker peasant*, *ouvrier-paysan*, *arbeiterbauer*, *operai-contadini*, *camponês-operário*, etc.), thereby reflecting the growing unification of urban and rural labour markets (Etxezarreta, Cruz and others, 1995, p.78). Although there was and still is some controversy over the criteria to be used to define the concept of part-time farming, until the late 1970s and early 1980s most studies clearly saw it as a transition phenomenon (Kolankiewicz, 1979, p.67) that foreshadowed the eventual disappearance of small-scale peasant farms in modern agriculture. It was also interpreted as clear manifestation of the rural exodus process and one of the survival strategies used by peasant families with farms that had not modernized (Naredo, 1996, pp. 180-182; Arnalte, 1980, p.222).

Use of the term "pluriactivity" to identify a phenomenon that is similar to part-time agriculture not only reflected changes in perspective in the debates on agricultural development and the role of family farming, but also signalled a radical change of attitude towards this topic in the academic and political world. In the early 1980s, developed countries, particularly in the European Union, were really moving away from the paradigm of productivist modernization which had guided agrarian and rural thinking since the 1960s, to another (subsequently referred to as the paradigm of multifunctionality) which introduced new criteria for upgrading rural areas, redefining the function and status of agriculture within them, and giving direction to the new agrarian policies. These criteria highlighted the importance of crop and livestock activity for the territorial balance and dynamism of rural zones, in addition to the conservation of natural resources (Hervieu, 1996; Moyano, 1997). The changes were reflected both in the academic domain (Fuller, 1984 and 1990) and in key documents issued by the European Commission, such as the green paper entitled *Perspectives for the Common Agricultural Policy* or *The Future of Rural Society* (European Commission, 1985 and 1988). The corresponding climate of change elicited a far-reaching review of the treatment that part-time agriculture had received until then; and this intellectual and political course-correction adopted the new term "pluriactivity". Thereafter, not only would the diversification of farmers' activities and incomes (both on and off the farm) be recognized as an unquestionable phenomenon in European agriculture, but it would also be seen as a positive factor for rural development, as reflected in the Leader Initiative in the European Union and, more recently, in the new rural regulations that establish a single instrument for funding rural development policy in the European Union, namely the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

From the analytical standpoint, conceptual change was equally important in the transition between the notion of part-time agriculture and that of pluriactivity. Studies on the first of these concepts, developed especially in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), classified the socio-employment status of farm owners in terms of the time they spent on agricultural tasks on their own farms. Based on this criterion, situations of full-time agriculture were compared with part-time farming, without considering the employment activity of other family members. It should be noted that the negative perception of part-time farming also permeated the labour-union and political world during the golden age of productivist modernization, thus revealing the antipathy towards it that was cultivated by the most influential union organizations in the European Economic Community (EEC), and the scant attention paid to it in institutions where the directions of European agricultural policy were being debated.

The emergence of pluriactivity coincides with an abandonment of the "work time", criterion to classify farms.[3] Moreover, as noted by Etxezarreta, Cruz and others (1995, p.416), the phenomenon is not only based on the activities of the farm owner alone, but encompasses all family members. It is no longer a question of measuring just stable and regular jobs, but labour activities of all types with the aim of ensuring remuneration for them. Whereas until the early 1980s, part-time agricultural work was treated with disdain, in subsequent decades, given the crisis of agricultural surpluses, pluriactivity

[2] This conceptual transition has been expertly analysed by Fuller (1990).

[3] This definition suffered from classification difficulties and gave rise to a major international debate (see OECD, 1978).

has been encouraged by providing incentives to the role of farmer-entrepreneur for the purpose of diversifying income sources (both agrarian and non-agrarian).

Nonetheless, most academic efforts to analyse this phenomenon have taken place in developed countries. Although there have been a number of pioneering studies in Africa and Latin America, such as those of Christodoulou (1982) and Okafor (1982), cited in Cavazzani and Fuller (1982), there has been little research on this issue from the standpoint of developing countries.

The search for work off the farm was seen as an unquestionable sign of the precarious nature of peasant life in Mexico (Stavenhagen, 1981, p.194) and in Latin America generally, i.e. as synonymous with "de-peasantization". The role of complementary income sources has been analysed in other studies, such as Szekely (1977), as a response by communities to their predicted physical demise. The famous debate between "peasantists" and "de-peasantists" (Feder, 1981) concealed very different positions from those that would later place a higher value on the nature of the processes affecting family modes of production,[4] i.e. pluriactivity.

In the first few years of the new millennium, several studies have appeared on rural non-farm employment, such as the work coordinated by Reardon, Berdegué and Escobar (2001), which analyses the importance of non-farm employment and income earned from non-agricultural activities in selected Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru).

In the case of Brazil, studies on part-time agriculture and pluriactivity have started to appear only very recently,[5] with most research focusing on the southern region of the country (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná) where this phenomenon is gaining considerable strength.

A major project in this field is *Projeto Rurbano*, which began in 1997 and is currently the most significant effort being made to analyse the trend of non-farm employment in Brazil.[6] Nonetheless, an increase in the proportion of the population working in non-agricultural activities does not necessarily mean a rise in pluriactivity, although the combination of labour activities within families is not always clearly identified.

Before measuring the importance of pluriactivity, and with a view to identifying the elements that explain its characteristics in RGS, the next section will describe the methodological framework of the research that formed the empirical basis of this article.

III

The theoretical and methodological framework ofthe research

This research studied how rural families adapt to changes in the different zones of RGS, and analysed the dynamic within which family farms operate under the economic, social, political and cultural forces impinging on them. Our research aimed firstly to analyse the importance of pluriactivity among the strategies of rural families in RGS; and secondly to understand the various ways in which the phenomenon appears as a response to the external setting and the opportunities this provides them. Two forms of pluriactivity therefore need to be distinguished: agrarian and non-agrarian.

Agrarian pluriactivity occurs in economic settings offering very few job opportunities outside the agricultural sector, so crop growing or livestock activities are almost the only income sources available to rural families; and farming basically sustains the dynamic of local development. In such contexts, small-scale farmers and their family members alternate activities on their own farm with work on other properties, either as wage

[4] This perspective can also be seen in the classic study by Warman (1985) on what was then referred to as "off-farm incomes".

[5] On the topic of pluriactivity in Brazil, see Sacco dos Anjos (2001).

[6] The characteristics of the project and the materials produced can be consulted on the website: http://www.eco.inicamp.br/nea/rurbano/rurbapre.html. See, Graziano da Silva (1999) among others.

earners or on a self-employed basis. In one variant of this type of agrarian pluriactivity, small-scale farmers and their families diversify their activities without leaving their farms, by exploiting the natural resources in their surroundings and adding new value to crops and livestock products obtained on their properties. This category is similar to what Gasson (1986) calls *farm-based enterprises*. An example of this variant would be a family that makes sausages, prepared foods or dairy products from produce obtained on their farm, to earn supplementary incomes. Pluriactivity does not include farms in which such complementary activities are intended for the family's own consumption alone.

The second type of pluriactivity is non-agrarian and is associated with the unification of labour markets (agricultural and non-agricultural, rural and urban). This type includes situations in which members of rural families work on a regular and stable basis in firms (commerce, industry and services) located in the surrounding rural area or in urban zones relatively nearby. In this second case, pluriactivity is practised by family members and the incomes earned from such non-farming activities are used to finance the joint family project, rather than the individual projects of each of its members.

In this study, although family farms in RGS could have been analysed using a random sample covering the entire area of the state, it was decided to give priority to zones in which family farming is the predominant production model. Accordingly, four study zones were chosen, the south, northeast, northwest and north of the state; and a representative municipality was selected[7] for each one (the exploratory phase of the research had previously revealed the number and location of family farms in each municipality). Based on this information, we adopted the methodological strategy of "systematic sampling by community", selecting at least 10% of all farms in each municipality. This essentially meant choosing a sample that covered the broad range of situations in which family farming is practised in southern Brazil. Large farms were eliminated from the sample (in this region those larger than 70 ha), along with farms in which the amount of labour hired (either temporary or permanent) to undertake the productive processes on the farm itself outweighed that provided by the family's own labour force, taking the 2001/2002 agricultural season as a reference. Also excluded from the sample were so-called *"chácaras"* (small weekend chalets) and properties devoted exclusively to tourism or uses other than crop and livestock production.

The four study zones contain roughly 2,500 farms in all. From this universe we drew a sample of 238 family farms, which were subjected to a questionnaire containing closed-response questions. The replies was entered into a database which was then processed using a *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) program containing some 1,200 variables. The methodological design aimed to gather data on farmers' motivations, their expectations for the future, their social claims concerning the rural world and their opinions on the current state of agriculture. This study classified as "exclusively agricultural" any family in which all working-age members devote their entire activity to the farm's production. The mere fact that a single person in the family group combines a non-agricultural activity simultaneously with work on the farm was sufficient for the family to be classified as pluriactive.

IV

Approach to family farming in Rio Grande do Sul

Rio Grande do Sul is the most southerly state in Brazil, with a land area equivalent to about 56% of the area of Spain. To the northwest it borders with Argentina and to the southeast with Uruguay. The most recent population census conducted in 2000 (IBGE, 2001) recorded a total population of 10.18 million, of whom just 18.3% were living in rural areas. While RGS accounts for 3.3% of national territory, its contribution to national wealth is much greater, since it is ranked third in terms of exports among the 26 states comprising the Federative Republic of Brazil. The state's current export basket includes not only agricultural products (meat, cereals, fruit and oilseeds), but also industrial products such as footwear, automobiles, buses and others.

[7] The municipalities were chosen not only on the basis of the researchers' prior knowledge of the conditions under which the family farming dynamic operates, to be representative of the reality of the zone with which they are associated, but also by ensuring a similar total number of farms to those in other municipalities (roughly 700 - 800 family farms).

For the purposes of the argument put forward in this article, it is interesting to note that RGS is home to one of the most important family farming sectors in Brazil, not only in terms of its quantitative significance, but also because of its economic and political weight compared to the other Brazilian states. Analysts generally agree that this development model has its roots in the flourishing of "colonial agriculture" (implemented by European colonists) and the resultant capital accumulation process — a phenomenon in which immigrant technical knowledge played a decisive role. The first three decades of the twentieth century coincided with the boom of this economic and social system, which later was profoundly altered by the green revolution and, in particular, the "conservative modernization" process implemented by Brazil's military governments between 1965 and 1980.[8] The scope of these changes seems to be closely related to the expansion of soybean cultivation, which today is the leading crop grown in RGS, in terms of both area cultivated and total output. In fact a majority of national soybean production is obtained there: every year about 3,000,000 ha are cultivated, generating roughly 6 million tons (20% of national production).

There are 429,958 farms in RGS, 92% of which are smaller than 100 ha, occupying 32% of the total agricultural area. Farms of under 50 ha produce 52.28% of the total value of the state's agricultural output (61.51% of animal production and 46.71% of plant production). The share of large farms is growing only in activities such as extensive livestock breeding or grain production (rice and wheat), although soybeans are cultivated on both small and large farms.

Nonetheless, for many years now, decisive changes have been unfolding in Brazilian agriculture, particularly in the southern states, following the intensification of the agro-export model and other related factors. In fact, as noted by Belik (1997), a new pattern of state intervention in agriculture has been introduced in Brazil since the mid-1980s. Among other things, this has transferred to markets the task of regulating agricultural prices, with a sharp withdrawal of state protection mechanisms against a backdrop of increasingly open trading arrangements and liberalization of agricultural imports. The specific and immediate result of this new intervention model has been a substantial reduction in the land area devoted to major crops (particularly rice, maize, wheat and cotton), together with a reduction in agricultural incomes and a sharp decline in the number of active farms.

Trade liberalization and successive multilateral agreements have merely exposed the Brazilian productive sector to international competition. Paradoxically, the decline in the area cultivated —especially visible in the southern states— has coincided with an increase in agricultural output, particularly in the so-called dynamic crops (i.e. those destined for export or import substitution). A "professionalization in agriculture" process has become well established, which exerts increasing pressure to achieve constant productivity increases, without this generating higher incomes: in fact the contrary. The current situation further deepens the productivist dynamic, insofar as this is possible, particularly as a result of the recent overvaluation of the national currency (the real) which is causing a sharp decline in agricultural incomes.

[8] Classifying this modernization process as "conservative" reflects the fact that it has served to maintain a highly concentrated agrarian structure, with no measures to redistribute land ownership. This has triggered an unprecedented rural exodus, a bias towards export crops (dominant among the large farms), and promotion of income and resource transfers to the urban-industrial sector. Woortmann (1999) attributes part of the process of change and the economic and survival problems faced by family farming to the exhaustion of possibilities for expanding the agricultural frontier, instead of (or as well as) conservative modernization, with the departure of family members who became "superfluous", and a downsizing of farm areas through subdivisions caused by inheritance.

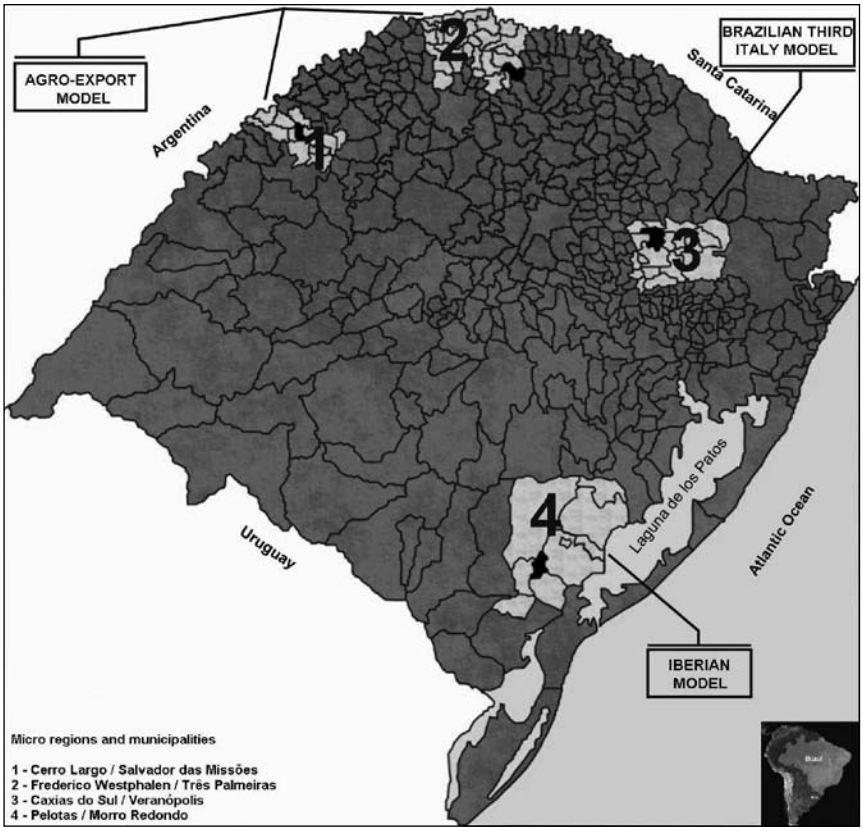
V

Study areas and territorial dynamics

As noted above, this study was conducted in four zones of RGS (north, northwest, northeast and south) identified, respectively, by the following four reference municipalities: Três Palmeiras, Salvador das Missões, Veranópolis and Morro Redondo (map 1). Although those zones are highly varied in terms of their technological and economic characteristics and in their human development levels, they were chosen as representative of the diversity of situations in which the state's family farming unfolds.

MAP 1

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): territorial dynamics of development



Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of IBGE data.

We start from the assumption that there is a degree of cohesion in many rural areas of the state, reflecting the presence of common social and economic structures and a territorial dynamic that is relatively integrated and homogeneous, reflecting processes that have affected family farming during the course of its history. This means that the region's economic development level affects both the social reproduction of rural families and farm dynamics. For example, significant development of the industrial services sector creates economic opportunities for the rural population in a given locality. Thus, economic activities existing at the local, district or regional levels, display greater or lesser articulation or capacity for combination with agricultural activity,

which, in the end, will influence how pluriactivity is (or could be) manifested in each study zone.

The four areas selected are not necessarily administratively defined zones, however, but have been identified specifically for this study, given our interest in the processes they have undergone or their organizational forms. Each of these areas is subject to the effects of a given "territorial development dynamic", which reflects the way the region in question has historically participated in the broader setting, either through its physical, political and institutional conditions, or through the structure of opportunities it provides to the active population living there. It should be noted that a territorial dynamic is not exclusive from the standpoint of its effect in a given geographic space, and it could affect other zones that have not been included in this research. The term "territorial development dynamic" is understood to mean the macro-processes that affect the zone in question and, among other things, define the character of socio-productive relations, resource allocation, and producers' expectations for the future. Below we describe the characteristics defining territorial development dynamics in the four study areas, identifying their most salient features.

1. The agro-export model

The defining feature of this dynamic is the key role played by agricultural commodities (particularly soybeans and wheat) in the development and sustenance of economic activities. The social and productive fabric is entirely dependent on the trend of these crops, such that in years of climatic disaster or low international prices, the regional economy is profoundly affected. Although soybean cultivation occurs almost throughout RGS, it is undoubtedly much more prevalent in the north-northeastern part of the state, including areas such as Missões and Alto Uruguay. The soybean boom (1965-1980) led to a number of changes, including an intensification of the commercialization process in rural areas. This meant that all available spaces were turned into an almost exclusive substrate for the production of these commodities. The globalization process has merely accentuated this trend in the state's rural areas, with the result that the productive fabric is specialized and the labour market has less and less capacity to absorb local workers, thus generating intensive migration towards other areas of the state, either permanently or temporarily. The traditional model involving a combination of crop growing and livestock activities has been replaced by specialization, with results that include increased vulnerability in the regional economies, concentration of land use and repeated job loss, since soybean cultivation uses little labour.

The pluriactivity that emerges in localities subject to this agro-export model, is closely linked to the dynamic of agrarian processes and corresponds to the agrarian pluriactivity category as described in the introduction to this article. The research detected two broad modes of agricultural pluriactivity. Firstly, that based on para-agricultural activities, i.e. practices involving the manufacture or transformation of agricultural produce on the farm itself (cheeses, sausages, processed foods, etc). We encountered that type of pluriactivity in Salvador das Missões (study area corresponding to the northwest of RGS, which reflects a feature of German colonization that has been relatively well preserved, despite the aforementioned impact of the spread of soybean cultivation (*soya-ization*).

The second type of agrarian pluriactivity is exemplified by the situation of medium-scale farm owners who may provide services on other farms. One modality is "contract work", i.e. the hiring of another farmer's services (on an hourly, daily or task basis), together with the machinery and equipment needed to undertake specific tasks (ploughing, harvesting and so forth). This type of pluriactivity reflects farmers' efforts to make profitable use of their specialized machinery, and thus diversify their income. Sometimes farm owners and/or members of small-scale family farms work for other producers as temporary wage-earners. Each of these forms of pluriactivity has been found both in the north and in the northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, and reflect the adaptation capacity of family farming, particularly in areas affected by the expansion of commodities noted above. In keeping with the classic premise of Chayanov (1974), family farming strategies display a lot of flexibility in their use of available family labour, such that its productivity and economic return can be raised significantly by distributing the overall work force between agrarian and non-agrarian occupations throughout the year. Nonetheless, there is a paradox in family farming situations, because we find quite often that the roles of contractor and contracted party are reversed.

2. The Brazilian Third Italy model

The so-called Brazilian Third Italy (the *serra gaúcha*)[9] corresponds to a region in the northeast of RGS which is strongly influenced by Italian colonization. The productive

[9] People and places in the state of Rio Grande do Sul are known as *gaúchos*.

fabric is highly diversified, and social indicators show that the municipalities comprising it have the best development levels in the whole country. This is one of the most important national tourist destinations and includes municipalities that are important for wine production. There are many industries in the region, particularly metallurgy, footwear and agrifood. Agriculture includes poultry and wine production, in addition to pig breeding and fruit and vegetable growing. Output is marketed just 120 km away in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, the state capital. As a result, the labour market has considerable capacity to absorb local labour; and this is reflected in a heavy presence of peasant workers, i.e. a type of worker who combines family farming with work in local industries. This type of pluriactivity entails a form of employment relation that reflects the unification of the urban-rural labour market and is typical of non-agrarian pluriactivity. Nonetheless, this is where we find a strong presence of the fundamental features defined in the specialized literature as the "*colonist ethos*" - identified with the "myth of peasant autonomy", in which certain family practices are preserved to guarantee abundant and self-sufficient food. Despite steeply sloping cultivated areas and the small size of farms, this zone of the study is where the highest incomes have been found among the four territories analysed, as a result of the highly diversified productive structure noted earlier.

3. The Iberian model: an eclipsed family farming

The southern part of the state of Rio Grande do Sul is closely identified with large estates (*latifundios)*, engaging in extensive livestock breeding and irrigated rice production, over a wide ranging plane that stretches from the eastern portion of the state to the border with Uruguay. In the second half of the nineteenth century particularly, German, Italian and French immigrant families settled in the small mountainous region that extends across eight municipalities to form the zone called *Serra dos Tapes*. Specifically, this is a type of family farming enclave in an area in which estate-based or business agriculture holds sway. Family farms represent a sector of *gaúcha* agriculture which enjoyed a period of relative economic prosperity until the 1970s producing peaches, asparagus, tomatoes and milk, and was well integrated into the region's agrifood industries. Since then, however, economic liberalization and competition from other MERCOSUR countries have pushed it into a profound crisis. The declining importance of these family-based farming operations seems to be matched by a decrease in farming incomes, the disappearance of many farms and expansion of other crops such as tobacco in a system of vertical integration with transnational enterprises.

The term we have used to define this territorial development dynamic (eclipsed family farming) refers to the obstacles that family farms have historically faced in attempting to become the predominant form of production at the local and regional level. Family farming today has fewer alternatives for increasing its participants' income in a context of market liberalization and economic deregulation; and social transfers are becoming increasingly important as a means of providing families with material sustenance. Given the scant productive diversification and considerable weight of extensive activities and crops (livestock breeding and rice growing), the regional labour market has very little capacity to absorb the local work force throughout the year. Unlike what happens in other parts of the state, family production in this zone has never managed to develop a specific place in the social structure in keeping with its demands and interests.

Having set out the aim and conceptual framework of the research, we now review the results that directed our thinking on pluriactivity and its manifestations in Rio Grande do Sul.

VI

Pluriactivity and family farming in southern Brazil

In this research we decided to adopt a broad definition of pluriactivity, considering any rural family as pluriactive if it directly operates and manages a farm with its own labour, but not all of its working-age members devote their entire productive potential to farming activities. Viewed in this way, pluriactivity is not defined exclusively by the activities of the farm owner, but takes account of the type of activity undertaken by all family members.

Considered as a whole, pluriactivity is present in 43.3% of the farms analysed. Nonetheless, there are significant differences between the zones studied, as shown in table 1.

Veranópolis, where the "Third Italy" pattern predominates, displays the greatest prevalence of pluriactivity (57.6% of all farms). At the other extreme, under the dynamic of the agro-export model, Três Palmeiras displays the lowest prevalence (pluriactivity in 27.1% of farms). Nonetheless, while in Veranópolis there is a wide range of pluriactive activities and situations, such as the recurrent and classical presence of the peasant farmer who also works in the region's footwear and metallurgy factories, pluriactivity in Três Palmeiras seems basically to be associated with precarious forms of farm employment (day labourers) or the provision of mechanization services by more highly capitalized farmers.

TABLE 1

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): proportional distribution of exclusively agricultural and pluriactive farms, useful farm space and number of family members

Variable	Municipalities [a]							
	Morro Redondo		Veranópolis		Salvador das Missões		Três Palmeiras	
	Exclusively agricultural	Pluriactive	Exclusively agricultural	Pluriactive	Exclusively agricultural	Pluriactive	Exclusively agricultural	Pluriactive
Farms (%)	58.1	41.9	42.4	57.6	53.5	46.5	72.9	27.1
Useful farm space (hectares)	21.15	18.02	16.27	12.74	19.94	12.66	19.96	16.99
No. of family members	3.6	4.3	3.8	5.2	4.0	5.0	4.0	4.0

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

[a] These municipalities respectively represent the four zones of the state of Rio Grande do Sul covered by this study: south, northeast, northwest and north.

This second type of pluriactivity can also be seen in Salvador das Missões, associated with the agro-export model, although in this case its prevalence is higher (46.5% of farms) and it is more varied than in Três Palmeiras. For example, the fall in international soybean prices and instability in wheat production have led family farmers to seek income alternatives by diversifying activities on their farms. Thus, some farmers choose to create small-scale agribusinesses devoted to producing dairy products and/or the sugarcane by-products (molasses, unrefined or *mascavado* sugar, aguardiente and homemade sweets), to add value to the output obtained from their farms.

The type of pluriactivity seen in the locality of Morro Redondo, associated with the "Iberian pattern", is based on highly precarious employment modalities, largely resulting from participation by the farmer or members of his family in a range of seasonal activities, such as peach harvesting on other farms or undertaking temporary work or tasks in the rural construction sector or in local slaughterhouses and meat factories. Thus the few industries that exist in Morro Redondo produce canned peaches and employ members of rural families during the canning period (December to March). The productive fabric of this locality provides very few job opportunities for the local labour force, especially for young people, who are forced to migrate to other regions to continue their studies or work as domestic employees in urban homes. Table 1 shows that in the four municipalities analysed, pluriactive families tend to have smaller farms than those that work exclusively in agriculture. Another recurrent fact is that pluriactive families cultivate farms with a smaller useful space and tend to have larger families, except in the case of Três Palmeiras, where there is no difference between the two categories.

1. Economic size of the farm and pluriactivity

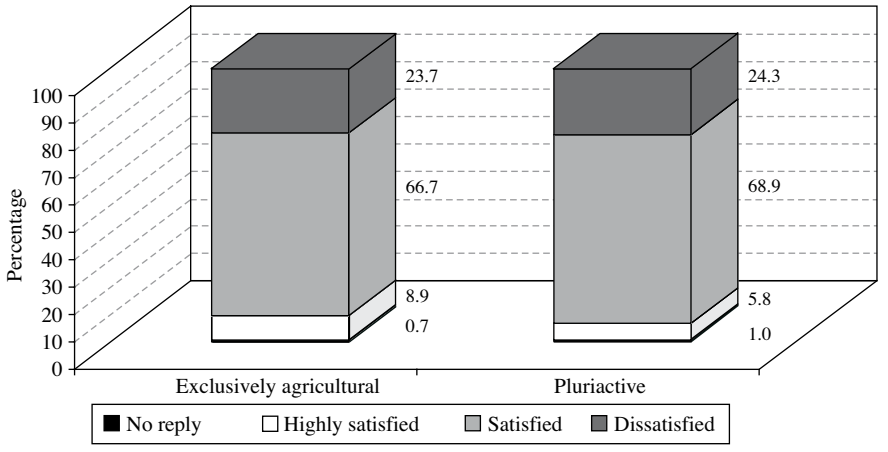
The 1980s, 1990s and first few years of the new millennium brought major changes to Brazilian agriculture. Productive modernization has increased and international trade has expanded, thus exposing the productive fabric to external competition. What has come to be known as the "professionalization of agriculture" conceals the progressive disappearance of many family farms, particularly the smallest ones that prove unable to adapt to this new scenario. All of this causes a reduction in the active farming population.

In the southern part of RGS the adjustment effort is visibly associated with the progressive disappearance of peach cultivation, which has been rapidly replaced by tobacco production fuelled by an expansion of international demand. Moreover, one of the factors thought to have most affected national agriculture is the unpredictable behaviour of the commodities market, especially for soybeans, where prices do not always guarantee incomes that are compatible with the need for investments and the risk level of this type of production.

The new scenario is interpreted differently by family farmers, depending on their organizational capacity to deal with the changes in question; the economic and productive conditions of their farms; access to new markets; proximity to large consumption centres; availability of labour; the stage of the family's life cycle, and other microeconomic factors. It should also be remembered that the situation of the Brazilian countryside has been altered by the force of change in society generally, with rural families being introduced to new consumption patterns and the satisfaction of needs that until recently were basically the preserve of the urban population, particularly in terms of well-being, household equipment and quality of life (television sets, electronic equipment, telephone services and so forth). In this regard, an activity governed by natural rhythms cannot always ensure a level of income that is compatible with these "new needs". We therefore need to consider whether or not these elements and factors of change tend to make pluriactivity more prevalent. While the data from our study do not allow us to answer this question satisfactorily, other information sources approach the subject indirectly, by investigating the extent to which pluriactive farmers are satisfied with the current state of farming activity. In fact, as figure 1 shows, there are no differences in the degree of satisfaction between pluriactive and full-time farmers, since the proportions declaring themselves dissatisfied are broadly the same in both groups (23.7% and 24.3%).

FIGURE 1

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): percentage distribution of pluriactive and exclusively agricultural farmers, by degree of satisfaction with the current state of agriculture



Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

Nonetheless, when the degree of satisfaction is evaluated by study zones and according to farming and total incomes (i.e. total income from all sources), several interesting observations can be made, as shown in table 2. Firstly, across the four municipalities, the highest level of satisfaction among farmers seems to correlate strongly with higher income levels, both agricultural and total. Equally salient is the large gap that exists in income levels between satisfied farmers in the zone of the Brazilian Third Italy (the municipality of Veranópolis), and those living in other municipalities. The average agricultural income earned by unsatisfied farmers in the Third Italy zone is considerably higher than that of satisfied producers in Morro Redondo.

What seems quite clear is that pluriactivity alone is not sufficient to explain farmers' higher or lower degree of satisfaction among with the current state of agriculture. This leads us to suspect that the economic size of the farm, in terms of the resources managed by the families and the degrees of freedom they enjoy in satisfying their material needs, plays a much more important role in explaining such differences. The range of possibilities available to families to achieve social reproduction is considerably smaller in places where agriculture is the exclusive engine of the local and regional economy, as is the case in the northern part of Rio Grande do Sul. The argument put forward here focuses less on the heuristic potential of pluriactivity in explaining farmers' attitudes and impressions with respect to the future, but is more interested in the socioeconomic and institutional environment in which the families live. For example, the turnaround seen in some cases following the creation of small-scale family agribusinesses can only happen if regional markets are able to absorb the corresponding products and thus expand farmers' possibilities. Farms associated with the Iberian pattern suffer from a very serious crisis of expectations. As shown in figure 2, this zone contains the highest proportion of farmers who are discontented with the current state of farming, which is not surprising, despite the level of incomes mentioned above.

2. Pluriactivity and succession on the family farm

The forces fuelling the crisis of expectations in Brazilian family farming continue to operate, although more intensively in some parts of the territory than in others. Nonetheless, it needs to be asked whether the issue of succession affects exclusively agricultural and pluriactive farms equally. Table 3 shows that, in principle, the situation is more favourable among pluriactive farms than on those engaging exclusively in agricultural activities.

There are two possible explanations for this difference. The first stems from the fact that pluriactive families tend to be larger (see table 1 above), so successors are more likely to be found within the family. Yet, when

TABLE 2

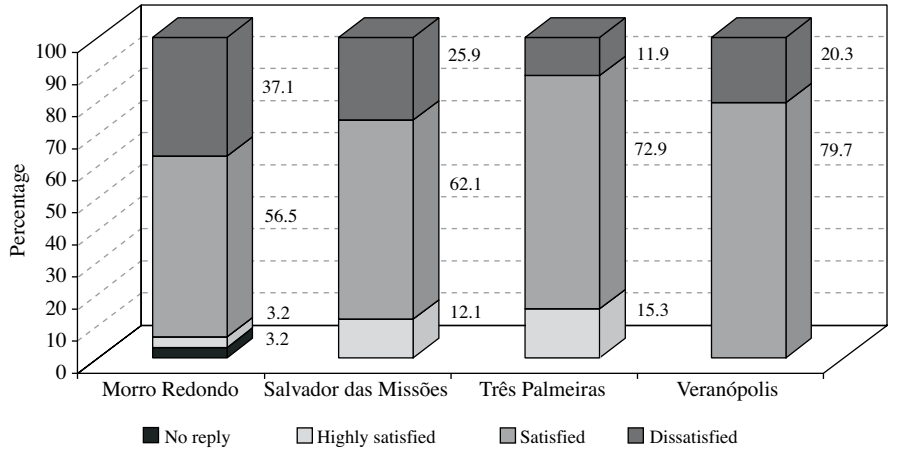
Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): average agricultural and total income, according to farmers' degree of satisfaction with agricultural activity
(US dollars)

Municipality	Type of income	Degree of satisfaction with agricultural activity		
		Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Morro Redondo	Farming	4 068,53	3 882,23	2 603,69
	Total	7 732,26	6 970,63	4 800,73
Salvador das Missões	Farming	14 237,76	5 164,06	4 824,30
	Total	20 706,17	7 673,08	7 223,64
Três Palmeiras	Farming	9 633,29	4 086,25	2 982,30
	Total	11 348,90	5 257,48	4 407,91
Veranópolis	Farming	–	8 220,82	6 100,94
	Total	–	13 943,49	9 536,90

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

FIGURE 2

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): percentage distribution of interviewees, by degree of satisfaction with the current state of agriculture



Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

we consider farms with no potential successors, the situation does not differ much between pluriactive ones and those that are exclusively agricultural. Nonetheless, in a larger proportion of latter, there was no reply from their owners, which may suggest that succession is more uncertain. This is a symptom of the breakdown of mechanisms that in the past ensured a more promising outlook for family succession, such as a large number of children. In the current setting, as shown in other studies (e.g. Sacco dos Anjos and Caldas, 2003), fertility rates have declined sharply, and this has intensified the ageing process in the rural south of Brazil (table 4). The smallest proportion of farms with potential successors is in the locality dominated by the Iberian model (Morro Redondo). Interviews held in this zone, as reported in Costa (2005), show that here more than elsewhere, a high proportion of rural youth choose to work in other occupations and abandon the rural sector early.

Nonetheless, irrespective of the hardships being endured by family farms at the start of the new millennium, the rural world clearly imposes a type of hereditary succession that is unmatched in other socio-employment categories, in which family relationships serve as the basic social link in the reproduction of family activity. In addition to these features of the decline of agricultural activities as generators of rural employment and income, there are other factors that corroborate this trend, except in zones that have turned themselves into dynamic innovation and development poles —particularly the Brazilian Third Italy, represented here by Veranópolis. In this regard, it did not seem useful to us to ask farmers whether they wanted their children to follow them into

TABLE 3

Rio Grande do Sul: distribution of pluriactive farms and exclusively agricultural farms, according to the potential existence of successors

Existence of successors	Pluriactive		Exclusively agricultural	
	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	56	54.4	56	41.5
No	37	35.9	44	32.6
No reply	10	9.7	35	25.9
Total	*103*	*100.0*	*135*	*100.0*

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

TABLE 4

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): distribution of farms according to the potential existence of successors

Potential existence of successors	Municipalities							
	Morro Redondo		Salvador das Missões		Três Palmeiras		Veranópolis	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	22	35.5	30	51.7	34	57.6	26	44.1
No	24	38.7	21	36.2	15	25.4	21	35.6
No reply	16	25.8	7	12.1	10	16.9	12	20.3
Total	*62*	*100.0*	*58*	*100.0*	*59*	*100.0*	*59*	*100.0*

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

TABLE 5

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): percentage distribution of pluriactive and exclusively agricultural farms, according to the desire of their owners for their children to be farmers.

Desire for children to be farmers	Percentage distribution (%)	
	Pluriactive	Exclusively agricultural
Yes	63.1	55.6
No	31.1	29.6
No reply	5.8	13.3
Not applicable	0.0	1.5
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

TABLE 6

Rio Grande do Sul (four municipalities): distribution of farms according to desire for children to be farmers

Desire for children to be farmers	Municipality							
	Morro Redondo		Salvador das Missões		Três Palmeiras		Veranópolis	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	32	51.6	34	58.6	36	61.0	38	64.4
No	23	37.1	19	32.8	14	23.7	16	27.1
No reply	6	9.7	4	6.9	9	15.2	5	8.5
Not applicable	1	1.6	1	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	*62*	*100.0*	*58*	*100.0*	*59*	*100.0*	*59*	*100.0*

Source: Research on family farming, local development and pluriactivity conducted by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Federal University of Pelotas and Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2004.

farming. The data contained in table 5 do not reveal significant differences on this issue between pluriactive farmers and exclusively agricultural producers.

As table 6 shows, however, the municipality with the highest prevalence of pluriactivity (Veranópolis) also reports the largest proportion of parents interested in their children going into farming. We agree with the argument that pluriactivity cannot be seen as a departure from the way in which families recognize their socio-employment situation. In other words, the fact that they engage in activities other than agriculture, including stable factory jobs (in the metallurgy and footwear industries, for example), does not alter the criteria by which families are identified, or the way in which their future reproduction projects are conceived. The major paradox seems to be that incomes earned off the farm (i.e. those obtained through pluriactivity) serve to strengthen family links with rurality and even with the status of farmer. But areas where agriculture is experiencing a crisis of expectations and there are few alternatives for increasing the family's economic income either on or off the farm (i.e. where there are no possibilities for pluriactivity to develop), are where we most intensively perceive the loss of cultural roots and identification with the farming profession. Although pluriactivity among families continues to be analysed from the agricultural standpoint, it is clear that the farm and its dynamic cannot be used as exclusive analytical benchmarks.

VII
Conclusions

There is increasing awareness of the complexity of pluriactivity and its implications. While in Brazil the issue has emerged only recently, differences of opinion have already emerged as to its importance as a subject of analysis or in relation to agrarian-rural public policies. It seemed worthwhile to us to pose the problem and perform this research, despite the insufficiency of statistical sources and the lack of studies based on primary data.

In this paper we have stressed that pluriactivity is highly heterogeneous and heavily conditioned both by the prevailing territorial dynamic and by macroeconomic conditions that may favour or discourage the prevalence of this phenomenon. In areas dominated by the agro-export pattern in the north-northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, pluriactivity seems to be associated with activities that are dependent on the pace of agriculture. Over the last 30 years, farms have made a major effort to modernize and adjust to the new production modality. The situation today is very different, given the fall in the international prices of agricultural commodities and a simultaneous rise in production costs. As a result, farmers are facing deteriorating incomes and increasing difficulties in meeting their financial commitments.

Modernization has fuelled a spectacular increase in output and decline in employment. Moreover, pluriactivity seems to be linked to para-agrarian activities and, to a considerable extent, to precarious occupations aimed at ensuring the satisfaction of family needs. In the southern part of RGS, under the Iberian development pattern, a region that was quite prosperous until the start of the 1960s is now immersed in a profound crisis of expectations. Recent trends reveal an industrial economy in outright decline, with the closure of many agrifood enterprises not only in the locality studied but also regionwide, thereby considerably reducing job opportunities for the rural work force. This seems to show that pluriactivity depends less on farmers' attitudes than on the specific opportunities provided by the labour market. It is no coincidence that the zone identified as the Brazilian Third Italy is the most pluriactive area of the study and has the highest agricultural and non-agricultural incomes among family farms.

It is also specifically in this zone that we obtained the highest proportion of affirmative replies regarding parents' interest in their children going into farming. In fact, we agree with the view that pluriactivity cannot be seen as a break with the way in which families see their socio-employment situation. The fact that they engage in activities other than agriculture, sometimes even holding stable factory jobs, does not alter the frames of reference with which families are identified or the way in which they view their future reproduction projects. A salient fact is that off-farm incomes (i.e. those obtained through pluriactivity) serve to strengthen families' links with rural life and even consolidate their status as farmers. Nonetheless, areas where agriculture is experiencing a

crisis of expectations and there are few alternatives for increasing the family's income either within or outside agriculture, are where we most intensively perceive the loss of cultural roots and identification with the status of farmer. Although pluriactivity among families continues to be analysed from the agricultural standpoint, it is clear that the farm and its dynamic cannot be used as exclusive analytical benchmarks.

When farms are considered as a whole, what one sees is that farm incomes are higher where the activities are exclusively agricultural than in cases of pluriactivity, a situation that is reversed when we analyse the sum of all incomes (farming and non-farming). With regard to the succession issue, we found that pluriactivity does not alter traditional succession and inheritance mechanisms on the family farm.

The dichotomy in family farming is increasingly accentuated in southern Brazil: firstly, there are a few farms whose market share is being maintained or even increasing; and, secondly, a large proportion of farms basically depend on activities outside agriculture, or else social security, or both. Most of the cases studied point to the insufficiency of incomes generated by the farm as a reason for pluriactivity. Nonetheless, there are other very important aspects related to what we have referred to as the territorial dynamics of development, which affect not only the prevalence of pluriactivity, but also the characteristics of this system as an expression of rural families' adaptation to ensure their members' social reproduction.

(Original: Spanish)

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